DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 748 CG 010 861

AUTHOR Peterson, James A.
TITLE Frontiers in the Education of the Elderly.
PUB DATE 30 Oct 75
NOTE 17p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document; Speech given at the Annual Conference/Workshop of the Adult Education Association (25th, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 26-31, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education Programs; Adult Learning; *Educational Gerontology; Futures (of Society); *Gerontology; Leisure Time; *Needs; *Older Adults; *Senior Citizens; State of the Art Reviews

ABSTRACT

Demographic trends indicate a continued population rise among the elderly, suggesting an expanded market for adult education efforts. Early retirement, unemployment due to technological change, as well as the need for older workers to stay current in their fields all point in the direction of education of the elderly. The elderly report great concern with the growing violence in the nation, as well as with inflation, nutrition and general health. Classes under the direction of experts, with the fellowship of others like themselves, would help the aged feel better and learn things of practical importance to them. The aged do attend many of the classes that are offered today. Of critical importance for service to the aged is continued expansion of training programs for workers. (NG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED128748

FRONTIERS IN THE EDUCATION

OF THE ELDERLY

Address given at the

25th Annual Conference/Workshop

Salt Lake City, Utah

October 30, 1975

Education for Aging Section

Adult Education Association

U.S.A.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

James A. Peterson, Ph.D.
Andrus Gerontology Center
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, California 90007

CG 012 861

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are four basic dimensions of social change that explain why adult education for older citizens is the most salient and the most exciting frontier in education in our century. Our exploration of those dimensions lead us to believe that it is imperative for us to finally actualize our verbalisms about life long education. We shall explore that thesis this morning.

The first dimension has to do with demographic trends. In 1900 only 3 percent of our population was age 65 or older. That is not surprising because the man or woman who lived beyond fifty was the exception. Families at the turn of the century rarely had both father and mother still living when the last child left home. Today, citizens who have already marked their 65th birthday comprise almost 11 percent of the population and they number 22 million persons. As we have always been a youthful nation, it is not surprising that almost all of our attention was focused on the potential of children and youth. The achievement of the rate of zero population growth for the last two years when projected thirty years from now gives us an estimate that over half the population will then be over fifty years of age. We are very rapidly becoming one of the world's older populations. If the task of education is broadly seen as that of creative adaptation, changing personal, social and cultural tasks the educational system must refocus on the last half of life. A frontier must have pioneers and the true pioneers of our

tomorrows are our elder citizens who are forging the molds for innovative and constructive contributions to their society.

The second dimension comes from an analysis of employment trends in our work world. Several years ago the civil service administration, because of pressure from its workers, established the period of life work to fifty-five. You will recall that the great debate in the Chrysler negotiations a year ago did not have to do with wages, but with retirement. The negotiations were successfully concluded when an agreement was reached that the worker who had been employed steadily for thirty years, was entitled to full pension at that time whether it be fifty or fifty-five years. The steel industry has much the same norms. In fact, over half the major industries in the United States now have provisions for early retirement. We have a long delayed study at USC in terms of faculty retirement. Almost fifteen percent of our current working faculty expect or wish to retire early. We might have expected that our current depression and concommitant inflation would have stilled the voices of those wishing early retirement, but the best statistical evidence we have is that there has been only a fourteen percent drop in applications in industry for early drop out of work. The implications of these trends are very obviously that in fifteen or twenty years, another ten million persons at leisure may be added to the twenty-five million above sixty-five who will be retired at that time. Some of these individuals will wish second career training, but all of them will be an avid audience for educational efforts to give meaning to their lives.

The third dimension has to do with technological advances in research and development. I tell my PhDs that after they have spent a year and a-half or two years in concentrating on their dissertations that they are already obsolete and that they must give the next year to catching up on advances in the field. Two years ago one of the students elected to replicate my own dissertation research done a quarter of a century ago. When I did that dissertation I hired three young men who were good with slide rules and we worked three months to put my statistics in order.

When he had his cards punched, the young man who redid my earlier research took exactly nine minutes with the computer. And he has additional data to mine for years ahead. Even if a man elects to work after fifty, and he is in a field where research is common, he will have to spend much of his time in classes or the laboratory simply to keep up with his younger colleagues. If we are beyond fifty years of age and unless many of us have studied strenuously to keep up our vocabularies, our information base, our techniques, our value and values may belong in a world of yesterday. It is not only for economic reasons that many of our universities are considering conditions under which elder professors can be retired, or a strange quirk or prejudice against the aged that motivates industry to put increasingly lower limits on the age of those they employ. Technological change makes it imperative that education focus on the constant upgrading of members of our work force. This would be true even if we could change the non-realistic norm of retirement at 65.

The fourth dimension is the result of psycho-social research that has proved now without doubt that age has nothing to do with intellectual acuity. Botwinik, Woodruff, Schaie and Birren have all proved that there is no significant intellectual loss for most persons as they age. We may not think quite as quickly as we once did, but conclusions are just as sound. Our store of information and our vocabularies can grow until we die. This research effectively destroys the myth that older persons have no capacity for continued mental growth or social contributions.

Early retirement, the dislocations caused by technological unemployment, the need for older persons who are employed to stay current, the growing demand for second career education --- all make adult education for those past fifty imperative. The growing number of older persons who have time and energy to devote to social and political fields demands that they be educated so that their investments will be relevant. The great number of persons at leisure invite help to make their free time constructive and creative.

In this country we have focused great attention on the causes of infant mortality. Great investments have been made in research efforts to eliminate the scourges that used to kill our children. We have made great strides in those fields. But now as we face an older population, we need to exert the same research and educational efforts in helping older persons, not just to waste away, but rather to make the most of their later years. It is not necessary for an aging man to totter with

his cane down the street, wandering aimlessly from store to store. He wanders because we have not provided directions to his life. He totters quite unnecessarily because we have not educated him in ways in which he could still be alert and vigorous. He needs no longer to be like the man with the hoe with his gaze upon the ground.

Man can be vigorous all his years, and if he has lost that vigor, it can be regained. Dr. Herbert DeVries has shown how only three hours of exercise a week can restore muscle, add significant strength to the heart, increase capacity to use oxygen and in general feel alert and well. Others have shown that good diet is not an esoteric or expensive thing. We don't need those millions and millions of vitamins, pills, sedatives that we take. But all of these findings have to be disseminated in classes or groups before they become effective. It is immensely rewarding to know that the myths about frailty of age are groundless, but it is challenging to think that we can transform the health and outlook of twenty million people. If we do this for them, we are sure to have rewards as a society from their investment in us.

Older persons need education on a great many subjects. They are terrorized by the growing violence in the nation and they are prime targets for burglaries, con men and grafters. The last poll taken shows that this is their number one concern. Yet there are a great many practical steps which they can take to minimize those threats. Crime prevention classes help them a great deal both in terms of modifying their behavior and in finding more peace of mind. Inflation has robbed

most of them between a third and a-half of their savings. They do not know how to cope with shrinking income. Classes designed to help them cope make an enormous contribution. Loneliness is a prime aspect of aging. It induces depression and other forms of mental illness. The sociability and excitement of learning go far to change the daily outlook of older persons. They are citizens and they take these responsibilities seriously as a larger proportion of them vote than younger persons, but they need updating on national and international issues. They would like to participate in life, but many of their skills need honing. This is also true of their desire, now that they have time, to venture into the world of music, or painting, or other cultural pursuits. But alone they are frustrated. In classes they have the direction of experts, and the fellowship of others. They would like to feel better, have more vigor, but unless there are those who will share with them practical methods of exercise, diet, life style, they stumble along. Most of their great needs are precisely those that a relevant adult education program can answer.

When we speak of a relevant adult education program, we are talking about more than the titles of courses. We are talking about meeting the life situation of older persons. For instance, it is doubtful if most 70 year old men and women need another diploma. They are turned off by long reading assignments, long lectures and examinations. We are not certain any more that the traditional academic procedure of sitting students in rigid rows on uncomfortable chairs in stark halls, contributes most to their growth.

We are certain that older persons like more informal and comfortable arrangements. Transportation is a major problem for them so that classes scattered throughout the community in churches, halls or homes, elicit better response. They like to participate, to ask questions, and to give opinions. But they value new information and exciting presentations.

You may wonder if they attend? There is a center in Kansas City called the Shepherd's Center which has as its goal the enrichment of the community to the extent that older persons can stay in their apartments or little houses with sufficient services so that they do not need to go into a half-way or a nursing home. Part of their commitment is to provide an answer to the problems we have mentioned as well as exciting intellectual stimulation. All day Friday is given to major lectures, classes, exercise, bridge lessons or what have you. Almost one thousand older persons from the immediate vicinity participate in that program. Furthermore, they now run it themselves, many of the classes are taught by their constituency and they determine the curriculum. Included in those classes are informational classes on protection, money matters, exercise, health information, German and Spanish, Yoga, Macrame, Hair styling, Food for pleasure and nutrition, Indians of the Northwest, knitting, needlepoint, embroidery, history, book reviews, art, faster reading, Appalachian music, chess, bridge, changing life styles, car care and personal growth. All of the generalized needs we mentioned in terms of what adult education might

meet are involved in this curriculum. When older persons are involved in helping plan adult educational programs both the structures and the substantive content will more likely meet their needs.

In general, it can be said that the educational establishment is responding to the challenge of population change and the needs of the elderly. Ten years ago there were only six Gerontology Centers in the nation's universities; today, there are over thirty. Secondary educational institutions are becoming aware of older persons. In Los Angeles there are over one hundred schools with programs. In California 56 community colleges have classes for the elderly and 52 of these have gold card programs with total or reduced fees; equally significant is the fact that 36 of these have advisory committees of older persons helping plan the locale and content of the programs. Many of these programs show innovative adaptations to the needs of the aging student body. San Jose has a nutrition program, Laney College developed its own Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Cabrillo College has a stroke Center, Porterville College has a van for counselling and Fullerton College has Center for Creative Retirement.

Thirteen of our state college or university campuses have one or more classes devoted to aging. Most of them focus on training professionals on a pre-service or in-service basis and only a limited number were designed for the aging themselves. Yet this service of training the professionals is indispensible. What is needed are more programs in teachers colleges and universities to train teachers. Training has a high priority if the educational establishment is to meet the

need of our elderly. We have not been able to locate many such programs although the Andrus Gerontology Center at the University of Southern California has a summer institute on aging that draws over six hundred students from all over the United States for its program. Other Gerontology Centers have courses that give background material. It is probable that each institution will have to develop in-service training programs that are responsive to the developing program for aging.

Many other agencies are giving support to education for the aged. There are a great many courses given at Leisure World in Laguna Hills, a community of eighteen thousand persons over 55. At Knox Village in Kansas City, a retirement community of three thousand persons, there are dozens of courses, some taught by residents and eighteen, by a near-by community college. The National Retired Teachers Association and the American Association of Retired Persons have some striking records of success in using peers for very successful specific educational tasks. Thus, there are over 50,000 of their members trained every year by the IRS to give free income tax assistance to other older persons and over twenty thousand peers are trained to help sharpen the driving skills of other oldsters. The Institute of Lifetime Learning under Dean Hixson has brought well rounded educational programs into many communities where there were no other institutions doing adult education. Most senior citizen centers have some classes and many have many classes. A few churches are venturing into educational efforts for seniors. The widow-to-widow program at the University of Oregon and the senior counselling program at the Andrus Center are pioneering the use of

para-professionals in quite sensitive areas.

It is heartening that much is being attempted, but often in sporadic and unco-ordinated ways. Consider pre-retirement counselling. This area is high in the priority list of educational efforts. In Los Angeles the adult education section of the secondary schools has a vigorous program in many sections; many of the community colleges are providing this service, UCLA provides an evening series on pre-retirement. USC has just concluded a very comprehensive program, but devoted to research in this field. NRTA-AARP from the private sector is pushing a carefully designed program. There is little correlation between all of these efforts and, unless some co-ordination is achieved, there may be competetion which would indeed be stupid when there are so many total needs of the elder which have not been met. State Offices on Aging and Areas Agencies on Aging do much to coordinate existing efforts and to broaden the response to needs.

I have been conducting a fifteen year longitudinal study of persons in a large retirement community. When I talked with them before they moved into facility one of the large areas of inquiry had to do with their motivations for leaving their homes and moving into this settlement. About twenty-five percent gave as a very high priority their need for intellectual stimulation and new mental frontiers. In a follow-up two years later I discovered that this need was met and almost all of them were participating in classes and seminars. Carlson has estimated that about 30 percent of our older population are accessible

or adult educational efforts. In California this means a minimum of 30,000 students not counting those between 50 and 60. But what about the other 70 percent? Sixty percent of them are mobile and certainly most of the remaining percent are accessible through radio, television and the written word.

It may be true that many oldsters have not been socialized to the value of education. They grew up in a different era and yet they need the services and the inspiration of an educational program. This probably means that we are faced with the task of aggressive recruiting. It is not enough to reach 30 percent. The others are also bowed by the weight of years and the confusions of a rapidly changing world. This recruiting will be partially achieved by new types of educational structures, locales and teaching methods, but it must also utilize some innovative techniques. We shall probably have to turn to training peers in this field as well as utilize that great servant of the aged, television. Whatever proves to be most efficacious can be used, but none of us should be satisfied simply because we have reached twenty-five or thirty percent of the elderly; and we are far from that.

I should like now to summarize the implications of what we have said in this paper:

1. There is a potential student body of twenty-two million persons above 65 for adult education. This total number is augmented by those who are troubled by mid-life changes,

by imposed second career expectations and those who need education to remain viable in their jobs.

2. These older persons are proved to have the intellectual resources and motivation to remain contributing citizens providing their information is current and relevant to a changing society.

3. Early retirement and displacement by technological displacement demands an extensive effort to help these individuals remain constructive and creative.

4. Science has provided us with parameters which can make the last half of life healthful and joyous, but these must be shared with older persons who have had no way of assimilating this information.

5. The growth of violence, criminal assault, graft; the ravages of inflation and loneliness in a fragmented society all petition for the marshaling of resources through educational programs for those most hurt by these trends, the older person.

6. Older persons have indicated enthusiastic response wherever informational programs have been instituted. We have a vast, willing and motivated student body waiting for our response.

7. Much is already being attempted, but often without training or insight. Academic programs of training

as well as in-service training is critical to the effective service to the older person.

8. A great many programs are being developed by educational and community agencies which need to be upgraded and coordinated in the hope that great areas now neglected can be serviced.

9. Most evidence indicates that about six million of the older persons are self-motivated and will participate in any adequate service or educational program; the other sixteen million must be cultivated, and recruited.

10. In planning programs, in recruiting for the classroom or discussion, in moving the community to respond to the inclusion of the older persons themselves as part of the planning process is essential.

11. As demographic trends determine the dimunition of the size of our infant and child population, the future of a well financed and well organized educational institution depends on our changing a youth focused curriculum and structure to one that is responsive to the growing number of those in the last half of life. This really means that adult education will no longer be a step-child, but a

fully accepted partner.

Beyond demography and social trends stands the bent figure of the man with the hoe. He is a caracature both in reality and in his potential. The twenty-two million older persons and the twenty million more who will soon face critical problems in mid-life need not be bent and looking only at the ground. It is our challenge to give back to them the upward looking and the light.

RESOURCES

STUDY FOR THE AGING, California Higher Education, Dr. Lee Swanson, Me. and E Building, Room 215A, El Camino College, California 90506. Summary is an Abstract "Olan for Action".

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS, Gundar Myran, Robert Huber, and Sean M. Sweeney, Nov. 1971 Report No. V, Kellog Community Leadership Services, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 426 Erickson Hall

The White House Conference on Aging .. special report on Education.. J. E. Birren, 1971

Distributed by:
NRTA-AARP Institute of Lifetime Learning
on behalf of the
Education on Aging Section
AEA/USA